

CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday, 8 July 2021
Report Subject	Digital Flintshire
Cabinet Member	Deputy Leader of the Council (Governance) and Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Assets
Report Author	Chief Officer (Governance)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council's current Digital Strategy, Digital Flintshire, covers the period 2017-2022. Since its approval the strategy has led to the advancement of digital services across the Council. Customers are able to find information and self-serve for an increasing range of functions, complemented by the Council's My Account that enables the Contact Centre to support customers when required.

In the 4 years since the strategy was approved there have been many changes, not least because the Council has completed objectives within the document. There have also been changes in the wider strategic context such as Welsh Governments digital that helps to define common minimum standards across the whole of Wales. Most significantly, of course, the changes needed to adapt to lockdown have accelerated demand for and the delivery of digital services.

It is appropriate to review and revise the strategy to reflect these factors. A revised draft is proposed that incorporates our learning, experiences, growth and ambition. It also features as a separate theme objectives to help reduce the exclusion that can be suffered without access the skills, devices or connectivity needed to take advantage of digital services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	<p>That the Committee comments on the proposed revisions to the digital strategy in general and that it specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) welcomes the progress made in achieving the aims of Digital Flintshire; b) agrees that the refreshed strategy sets the correct the aspirations for the further development of digital services; and c) is assured that the revised strategy will help to ensure that everyone will have equal access to digital skills, devices and connectivity.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING DIGITAL FLINTSHIRE
1.01	<p>Background:</p> <p>The Council's current Digital Strategy, Digital Flintshire 2017-2022, was adopted four years ago and is made up of six key themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Digital Customer• Digital Workforce• Digital Business and Community• Digital Partnership• Information Management• Digital Delivery <p>Each theme is led by a senior manager and is underpinned by a set of core principles and high level actions which are reflected within the Digital Strategy.</p>
1.02	<p>The Digital Strategy Board (DSB) is chaired by the Chief Officer for Governance and is comprised of theme leads and portfolio representatives from across the Council. It meets bi-monthly to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Receive theme updates to assess progress and remove barriers;• Review and assess business cases for new projects for inclusion in the Digital Strategy Project Plan, ensuring these meet key criteria for appropriate prioritisation;• Record and assess risks and issues. <p>The Digital Strategy Project Plan contains a list of all projects within the Digital Strategy which are assigned to a theme and reported against.</p>
1.03	<p>Progress:</p> <p>The Council has made good progress in delivering the aims set out in the Digital Flintshire 2017-2022. Some of the achievements include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improving customer service via updating the corporate website and expanding the range of services available to customers online via the use of forms linking directly to business systems;• The introduction of a customer account, My Account, delivering secure personalised services including school admissions, planning applications and garden waste schemes;• Collaborating with other authorities and partner organisations to deliver regional and national projects to improve service delivery and develop standardised ways of working and information sharing such as via the North Wales Legal Case Management System;• Working with the UK Government and North Wales Economic Ambition Board to improve broadband access throughout the region

	<p>via the LFFN programme and engaging with rural communities to assess their requirements and provide support;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of a solid foundation for delivery of the curriculum to schools via the Welsh Government HWB programme, updating infrastructure and technology to agreed national standards.
1.04	<p>The Covid-19 Pandemic has had affected both individual Projects within the Digital Strategy Project Plan and the overarching strategic aims.</p> <p>It has impacted the delivery dates of projects, increased the demand for new projects and redesign of services, changed priorities, expedited organisational and transformational change, and most importantly, changed the expectations of Flintshire residents as to how and when services are delivered.</p> <p>This has forced the Council to deliver services in a different way and to refocus its ambitions and approach to delivering its duties and obligations.</p> <p>Some examples of work undertaken throughout the pandemic and during recovery are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling remote learning by providing remote access solutions to schools; • Supplying devices and mobile Wi-Fi units to digitally disadvantaged learners throughout Flintshire; • Facilitating the continued delivery of key services by enabling employees to work from home; • Providing additional digital services and solutions such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New communication tools (e.g. video conferencing, Whatsapp) - On line applications for services e.g. business rates relief, childcare offers, free school meals, keyworker applications, childcare applications for vulnerable children, recycling requests. • Direct Covid Response work including sending letters and communications to vulnerable, shielding residents and using our data services to help residents by mapping and providing information on essential local services like pharmacies, food banks, delivery and other support services; • Supporting Test Trace Protect by developing systems, training, equipment and telephony.
1.05	<p>Digital Flintshire 2021-2026</p> <p>Audit Wales reviewed the Council’s strategy and made a number of recommendations for updates/revision. The report was issued during the pandemic and consequently implementing the recommendations has needed to wait.</p> <p>As part of refreshing the objectives within the strategy, work was undertaken to identify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demands and expectations of service users; • areas for development and • changes to working practices and procedures.

	<p>These are reflected within the revised strategy. In addition, the following changes have been made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The removal of completed actions and the addition of new and updated aims and actions; • The Digital Strategy for Wales, the requirements of the Local Digital Declaration, revised Council priorities, the changed environment and expectations of the Flintshire community have been reflected; • The governance arrangements have been updated. There is growing demand on IT services to increase the speed and scope of change that they can support within the Council (whilst still maintaining continuity of service). Prioritisation is key to ensuring that only those projects which significantly advance the aims of the strategy are taken forward; • Reframing of the key themes within the Digital Strategy to incorporate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Digital Business and Connectivity Replacing the existing “Digital Business and Community” theme to expand and focus on the work, locally and regionally, to help businesses in general and to improve access to high quality higher speed broadband - Digital Learning and Culture Incorporating lifelong digital learning and the development of digital opportunities for participation within Flintshire communities - Digital Inclusion Digital Inclusion wraps around all of the other themes and is a key consideration of all aims, principles, ambitions, actions and individual projects within the strategy. The aim is for residents to be able to exploit the benefits that digital can provide, tackling exclusion caused by lack of skills, lack of devices or lack of broadband, ensuring that no Flintshire resident is left behind in an increasingly digital world.
1.06	<p>Member briefings were provided on 28th June. The sessions covered the achievement made under the strategy to date, the proposed next steps and the changes in the themes. The sessions were positively received and generated a number of suggestions for follow up actions that were consistent with the proposed revisions.</p>
1.07	<p>A consistent concern for Members has been to ensure that, whilst the Council makes the necessary progress with digital services, no one should be “left behind”. The revised strategy takes a three pronged approach to making sure that everyone has access to the necessary skills, devices and connectivity to engage with digital services. These are picked up directly under the following themes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Digital Customer – Connects Centres provide assisted access to devices; b) Digital Business & Connectivity – the Council is working locally to improve access for individuals and communities and regionally, via the North Wales Economic Ambition Board, to improve the broadband infrastructure;

	c) Digital Inclusion – work within the Council on promoting access and with partners to improve peoples’ digital skills.
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2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
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2.01	Work is currently underway to ensure that the projects and ambitions within the strategy also have accurate costings assigned. This will create a funding plan and that any potential funding gaps are identified as early as possible. It is already clear that the level of ambition outstrips the available funding and the capacity of the IT Service to support new projects alongside day to day delivery and necessary renewals of software/hardware (so called “keeping the lights on”). Only those projects which are a clear priority can be taken forward.
2.02	The revised strategy contains the digital standards which to ensure that only those projects which advance our strategic aims are progressed. Also, part of the role of the Digital Strategy Board is to assess the priority to be allocated to projects within available finance and IT capacity.
2.03	Digital projects are also very demanding of transformation capacity within the services themselves so that existing work practices are amended to maximise the benefit that can be derived from any new software. Such projects need to be carefully dovetailed into the existing commitments of services to ensure that sufficient capacity exists and to minimise disruption to service users.
2.04	An action plan showing the start and end dates for projects is included within the revised strategy. This is a live document and is constantly adjusted in light of changing demands (such as emergencies or the previously unannounced termination of a piece of software). Portfolios are closely involved in ranking the importance of projects to help develop that sequencing plan.

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
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3.01	Ways of Working (Sustainable Development) Principles Impact	
	Long-term	Positive
	Prevention	Recognising that our population is aging and becoming more diverse, digital services mean more focus can be given to supporting those more in need of support. Recognising the threat of climate change, more flexible working practices mean less journeys impacting onCo2 emissions and air quality.
	Integration	Easy access to information and ability to easily manage day-to-day tasks digitally can help people to be self-reliant and prevent loss of independence.

Collaboration	Consultation results have underpinned the strategy and ongoing programmes of learning from feedback from citizens and users will inform future development.
Involvement	Benefits across the wellbeing goals from improved digital services e.g. an equal Wales. Working with our partners to deliver digital services that enable Health and Social Care Integration e.g. Single Point of Access (SPOA).

Well-being Goals Impact

Prosperous Wales	Improving local infrastructure to support developing businesses. Helping local people gaining relevant skills.
Resilient Wales	Changing working practices and developing skills for more resilient services and communities as the population and climate changes in the long-term.
Healthier Wales	Timely access to information to ensure support can be provided promptly preventing further deterioration, supported by real time information.
More equal Wales	Flexible services, responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable.
Cohesive Wales	Supporting improved internet connectivity so that information is easily and reliably available to enable all communities to be well-connected, informed and involved in their local area.
Vibrant Wales	Ensuring all services and information are provided bilingually.
Globally responsible Wales	More digital services reduces the need for journeys and resources such as fuel and paper, reducing Co2 emissions and use of resources.

Risks are logged, recorded and monitored by the Digital Strategy Board and included in the Corporate Risk Register where required.

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	Two Member briefings took place on 28 th June 2021.
4.02	It is proposed to consult user groups on the strategy especially the proposed themes of digital customer and digital inclusion. The conclusions of the IIA will also be tested/validated.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 – Digital Flintshire 2017-2022 Appendix 2 – Digital Flintshire 2021-2026

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	Digital Strategy for Wales – publication date 23 March 2021 https://gov.wales/digital-strategy-wales-html Local Digital Declaration - https://localdigital.gov.uk/declaration/

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	Contact Officer: Lisa McQuaide – Project Manager Telephone: 01352 702357 E-mail: lisa.mcquaide@flintshire.gov.uk

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	<p>Theme Lead: a senior manager responsible for overseeing and reporting against any projects which are assigned to their theme</p> <p>LFFN Programme – Local Full Fibre Network: a national programme to implement high quality broadband connections to key public buildings and sites, enabling providers to then offer packages to local business and residents who would not have been able to access these otherwise.</p> <p>HWB Programme: a national programme to invest in schools IT infrastructure and technology. The aim is to increase digital standards in schools across Wales by investing in a standard level of provision.</p> <p>Medium Term Financial Strategy: a written strategy which gives a forecast of the financial resources which will be available to a Council for a given period, and sets out plans for how best to deploy those resources to meet its priorities, duties and obligations.</p> <p>Capital Funding: Capital funding is usually utilised to acquire or improve a long-term asset such as equipment or buildings.</p> <p>Revenue Funding: is utilised for items that will be used within a year.</p>

<p>Examples include salaries, heating, lighting, services and small items of equipment. Routine repairs are revenue expenditures and can include significant repairs that do not extend the life of the asset or do not improve the asset.</p>
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